The House then adjourned at four minutes past eleven of the clock.

The House re-assembled at twelve of the clock.

[MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN in the Chair]

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO STARRED QUESTIONS

Connectivity among SAARC Nations

*241. SHRI S.M. LALJAN BASHA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has pledged to upgrade connectivity among SAARC nations;

(b) whether India has assured SAARC nations that fast action would be initiated from 1st April, 2007 by making it easier for access to roads and transport;

(c) what other assurances were given by Government at the second SAARC Business Leaders Conclave recently;

(d) whether other SAARC nations have agreed to cooperate; and

(e) the specific steps assured by other SAARC nations in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (e) Yes, Sir. During the 13th SAARC Summit held in Dhaka in November 2005, Prime Minister had stated that, "If we wish the next twenty years of SAARC to be different, we should take the first decision to reconnect the countries of the subcontinent on the one hand and then reconnect the subcontinent to the larger Asian neighbourhood on the other". We reiterated the need for greater connectivity in the South Asian region during the Second SAARC Business Leaders Conclave held in Mumbai on February 17, 2007.

2. During the upcoming 14th SAARC Summit to be held in New Delhi on April 3-4, 2007, it is proposed to focus on improving infrastructure connectivity in the region, particularly in transport, telecommunication and

energy links. It is also proposed to focus on improving regional trade through improved trade facilitation and increase people-to-people contact among the countries in the region.

3. The need for improved connectivity in the form of transport, transit and communication links across the region was recognized by the Heads of State and Government during the 12th SAARC Summit held in Islamabad and the 13th SAARC Summit held in Dhaka in January 2004 and November 2005 respectively. All decisions in SAARC are taken on the basis of unanimity.

4. Government are of the view that if South Asia is to become a dynamic component of the larger process of regional and international cooperation, it must bring about economic integration amongst the countries in the region. The first step towards this, in our view, is to substantially improve regional connectivity.

Brahmaputra Inland Waterways

*242. SHRI TARINI KANTA ROY: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) the time-frame for completion of Talweg Surveys, dredging etc. for implementation of Brahmaputra Inland Waterways in view of his D.O. No. F 20019/5/2007-MT dated 30.1.2007;

(b) the percentage of works already completed in view of the two years' time-frame fixed by IWAI for making National Waterways fully functional; and

(c) whether Government would consider to constitute a monitoring body with the elected representatives of Assam and West Bengal?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T. R. BAALU): (a) and (b) Regular talweg surveys are being done in the National Waterway No. 2(NW-2) from Dhubri to Sadiya on fortnightly basis. In alluvial rivers laden with heavy sediment load, which gets deposited in the navigation channel thereby reducing depth, regular survey is necessary to ascertain the water depth and identify the main channel. Dredging is required on shallow patches, which forms after every flood season. Presently, dredging in NW-2 is being done with the help of one hydraulic surface dredger